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Visual Communication and Organisational Change

Interdisciplinary Approaches

Linking Arts, Communication and Management

EUPRERA 2015

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Purpose

This paper connects research that explores arts-based organisational initiatives with the theory and practice of change management. It synthesises arts and management concepts that relate to change communications with a specific focus on *workarts*. It suggests that arts and visual-based communication can act as a form of knowledge translation and sensemaking helping organisations to embed the change process. In particular, it argues that public relations can be explored as translational practice a term that is now seen to be travelling as suggested by Bachmann-Medick (2009) from pure Translation Studies into other discipline areas and first articulated in an organisational change context by Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón (1996).

It asks three key questions:

- Can visual communication be better used to help embed the change process
- How does the specific concept of *workarts* contribute to sensemaking and change
- What value is the concept of knowledge translation to public relations and internal communications specifically

The research reflects on how Orbit Housing, one of the UK's leading housing associations, integrated the concept of visual communications and *workarts* into their reorganisation and cultural change initiatives between 2010 and 2013. Orbit operates in the Midlands, East and South East England and parts of London and is responsible for providing and servicing a range of social housing stock. It currently employs around 1500 people. In the last few years, the social housing sector has been impacted by two key concerns: firstly, some housing commentators and policy makers view housing associations as part of the problem not part of the solution to solving the lack of affordable housing in the UK; and secondly the reduction in government funding to the sector. This prompted Orbit to transform the way it approached its business with a focus on providing better housing choices and building communities. This needed to be underpinned by a dynamic internal culture driven by putting Orbit customers at the heart of decision making, maximizing efficiency and better using resources through a more commercial approach.

The study takes a phenomenological exploratory case study approach through interviews to understand the impact that participatory *workarts* can have on the change communication process. Such an approach allows the gathering of rich data and the exploration of employees as social actors in the change process. The paper presents a model for integrating *workarts* into change programmes and how it contributes to effective change communication processes releasing employee commitment and engagement. The limitations of this study are related to the scope of the research – a UK-focused case study. Further studies in different cultural contexts need to be explored and perhaps longitudinal studies developed to look at longer-term impacts of participatory *workarts*

This research is relevant from three perspectives. Firstly, change management is now seen as a critical communications and senior management skill (Cornelissen, 2011; Quirke, 2008). It is important that research continues to provide additional insight and evidences to help communicators and senior management teams deliver organisational change effectively. In many respects it builds on the work of van Vuuren and Elving (2008) who suggest that communication, sense making and change are interconnected.

Secondly, by integrating and synthesising scholarship from different fields of study the concept of change can be explored from an interdisciplinary perspective providing fresh insights.

Thirdly, idea of communication as a form of knowledge translation is under-explored in public relations, internal communication and employee engagement literature and this paper hopes to contribute to filling this gap.

Taken together, this paper aims to bring fresh conceptual and contemporary insights to the subject of change communications and provides practical applications.

Literature – theoretical foundations and insights

Defining Change and the importance of cultural alignment

Organisations are not static and are often in a constant state of flux and change as they adapt to the environment and demands of complex stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2011; Quirke, 2008). Change involves a disruption of the status quo. According to Trice and Beyer (1993: 395) it is a “disequilibrating process” that requires a break from the past and where cultural continuity is disrupted. In this case change is seen as substantial and extensive rather than a minor tweaking necessary on an on-going basis. It is recognised, however, that not all change is major and may take different forms ranging from complete reorganisation to the minor involving for example a change in customer service approach. Cornelissen (2011) looks at the primary focus of change pointing to four key areas: the adoption of new technology; restructuring and change in policies routine ways of working; change in the products and services of the organisation or change in organisational identity and culture. These require varying degrees of change supporting the views Trice and Beyer (1993) who argue there are three main types of culture change that relate mainly to the amount of change

required from revolutionary and comprehensive efforts to change the culture of the entire organisation; to efforts looking at specific subunits or subcultures within the organisation; and finally changes that are gradual and incremental but can be cumulative over time in terms of reshaping the organisation. They argue it is important to reflect on the pervasiveness, magnitude, innovativeness and duration of the change to assess the type of change management that is necessary to put in place.

This is similar to the views of Greenwood and Hinings (1996) who look at timeframes of change. They talk of evolutionary change (slow) and revolutionary change (quick and often affects the whole organisation). Corley and Gioia (2004) contribute ideas of additive and substitutive change with substitutive requiring a departure from the old or additive meaning addition to or an update to the old organisation. Substitutive change is radical often requiring a full redefinition of the organisation and are difficult to communicate and to secure employee support.

Management and leadership during times of change is vital if the organisation is to embrace change and ensure that any reputational damage caused through the change process is minimised and operational performance maintained. Reputation scholars such as Doorley and Garcia (2011) and van Reil and Fombrun (2007) have all come up with definitions of reputation but at its heart reputation is based on organisations performance, its behaviour and communication. This enables organisational stakeholders to form a judgement about the organisation. Underpinning this is the concept of image and identity alignment as suggested by Davies (2003) whereby the identity or culture of the organisation is matched with its image in terms of how others view it. As Doorley and Garcia (2011) suggest any serious effort to manage reputation must include a proper focus on aligning the behaviour and performance of the organisation's employees. During times of change this alignment can falter and significant change may bring about cultural confusion as to the new values and mission of the organisation, lack of clarity on individual roles and rumours and speculation. Organisations, however, seem to struggle with doing change well (Wheatley, 2006) that may reflect a lack of deep understanding of the importance of organisational culture and the role of employees in this.

Organisational culture has many definitions and the list is growing (Moorhead and Griffin, 2001) but Jaques (1952:251) offered one of the earliest definitions:

"The customary and traditional way of doing things, which is shared to a greater or lesser degree by all members, and which the new members must learn and at least partially accept in order to be accepted into the services of the firm"

More recent scholars (Bormann, 1983; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Harrison, 1972; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Rollinson and Broadfield, 2002) have all contributed to this theme but Bormann (1983) in particular acknowledged the fundamental relationship between communication and culture with communication playing a shaping and binding role on organisational culture. On a deeper level Bate (1994) views organisations as constructed worlds shaped by people as they devise explanations to cope with their everyday work lives. As Schein (1999) argues culture starts to form as a group develop shared experiences. As such culture cannot be viewed as a single entity and homogeneous and often

organisations display multiple cultures or sub-cultures (Trice and Beyer, 1993). Culture must be viewed as complex social process (Gundry and Rousseau, 1994) and the human side of culture must be acknowledged (Bate, 1994).

Despite varying definitions, Brown (1995) suggested the main features of culture include artefacts, language used, behaviour patterns and norms of behaviour, beliefs and values, as well as ideas around symbols and symbolic action. Building on these ideas Schein (1992) came up with three levels of cultural analysis that all interconnect and operate across organisations: artefacts (the visible organisational structures and processes); espoused values (the strategies, goals and philosophies) and basic underlying assumptions (the unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, perceptions and feelings). The first is easy to establish and change but it is harder to ensure the other hidden layers that underpin the organisation are aligned to the aspirations of the organisation.

As organisational culture is grounded in people and their experiences, the importance of employee support and commitment cannot be overstressed (Ruck, 2012).

Employee Engagement and Change Communications

As Cornelissen (2011) argues change and communications are entwined and communication is fundamental to the way change is formulated, announced and explained to employees, as well as contributing to effective implementation and cultural change. Lewin (1947) relates the change process to water freezing and involves four phases: recognising the need for change (unfreezing the organisation its culture and routines); development of a change plan (creating the vision); implementation of the change (moving towards that vision); and routinisation (re-freezing the organisation and its new culture and routines). Communication is fundamental in each of these phases and varies depending on whether the change is major – the more significant the change the greater the communication intensity and extent. For many such as van Vuuren and Elving (2008) although an elegant metaphor it doesn't capture organisational life that is more akin to transformation, flow and development rather than stop, start and static. Hence Weick (1979) uses the word organizing instead of organisation to capture this.

At the same time, scholars have likened the concept of change to the concept of grief. Kübler Ross (1969) argues that individuals go through five phases of trauma denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. When individuals are involved in the change process, they too go through trauma and part of the change process is allowing people to go through a grieving process. It is argued that communication should support and facilitate this process. Often change can imply a rejection of what has gone before which can appear hurtful. It is suggested people should be allowed to rejoice and celebrate the old allowing them psychologically to move on to the new.

Scholars (Argyris, 1999; Kotter *et al.*, 2006) have all tried to codify key stages of the change management process incorporating ideas around setting the stage and creating a sense of urgency for the change; setting a clear vision and mission and communicating this; and establishing a new culture to embed new ways of behaving. Herrero (2008) more recently challenged this linear approach arguing

change is more viral and change processes need to incorporate ideas around networks and relationships that are at the heart of organisational life. Taking more of a relationship perspective (Wheatley, 2006) argues organisations that are adaptive to change tend to focus on three key areas that have employees at the heart – connecting people to the identity of the organisation; connecting people to new information and developing relationships with people.

Organisations still often struggle to communicate and embed change (Quirke, 2008). He suggests this is often down to lack of clarity around strategy; failure to turn rhetoric into specifics; inconsistent messaging; too much focus on the rational rather than the emotional; reluctance to give employees freedom to question and not walking the talk. This is at odds with standard best practice approaches to leadership communication. Gray and Castles (2006) point to the importance of inspiring, informing, listening and deep involvement of employees.

Work on codifying communication strategies (Clampitt *et al.*, 2000; Smyth, 2007) point to a variation between those that merely focus on telling and selling information and those that focus on inclusion and co-creation.

Table 1: A summary of the Clampitt *et al.*, (2000) typography

Spray and Pray	Send out lots of information and hope that employees understand what is going on. Seems admirable but is not very effective. <i>Lots of information: Low communication effectiveness</i>
Tell and Sell	Communicate more limited messages that focuses on the core issues of the change. Then try and sell it to employees. Danger is that this is a very top down with little dialogue <i>Good amount of information: Medium communication effectiveness</i>
Underscore and explore	Focuses on several fundamental issues mostly closely linked to change and allows employees the freedom to explore the implications of the change. Here it aims to try and pick up on any misunderstanding and obstacles <i>Good levels of information: High level of communication effectiveness</i>
Identify and reply	Starts with concerns of employees. Assumption that employees best position to know the critical issues and need for change. Downside is that not all employees have the wider picture <i>Little information: Medium communication effectiveness</i>
Withhold and uphold	Withhold information until they can no longer do because of rumours or employee revolt. Assumes information is power and employees can't grasp issues. <i>Little information: Low levels of communication effectiveness</i>

Strategies that focus on inclusion and co-creation (Smyth, 2007) or underscore and explore (Clampitt *et al.*, 2000) tend to lead to more willing collaborators in the change process. It is accepted, however, that such wide scale involvement may not always be possible in large multi-national organisations so a

mix of strategies involving tell and sell and identify and reply are widely used (Cornelissen, 2011). This may also relate to timescales. Co-creation and inclusion may be more appropriate at the start evolving to wider mass communications later.

This supports the idea that there is a difference between information and communication as suggested by Elving (2005). Communication is about a higher level of mutual understanding and trust reflecting the ideas of Grunig and Hunt (1984) two-way symmetrical form of communication, where as information can be seen as simple one-way communication process.

As Heracleous (2002) argues it is critical when managing change to involve and encourage participation from as many employee by engaging and encouraging involvement. This directly relates back to management and leadership. As Somerville and Mroz (1997) suggest because of the speed of change employees need to react quickly and take autonomous decisions. This requires supportive and collaborative style of management rather than old command and control approaches of the past. Leadership is still critical (Pascale *et al.*, 2000) but change may need more adaptive leadership qualities to use Heifetz (1999) description to encourage and mobilise people.

The role of employees can be linked to the concept of organisational readiness to embrace change (ORC). This concept of organisational readiness is one familiar in healthcare scholarship (Gagnon *et al.*, 2011; Holt *et al.*, 2007; Weiner *et al.*, 2008) but it is suggested this concept is less well developed as it relates other non-health related sectors and fields of study. In part this reflects the amount of studies in recent years investigating how the National Health Service in the UK and other health providers have introduce evidence-based changes to commissioning and delivering health services.

According to Weiner *et al.*, (2008), ORC is an umbrella term for organisational members' collective motivation and capacity to implement change. Here readiness for change as defined by Holt *et al.*, (2007) is an attitudinal state influenced by the nature of change, the change process, the organisational context and the attributes of individuals involved in the change process. If the level of readiness is high then individuals are more likely to invest more in the change effort and try to overcome obstacles. Without it as Wise *et al.*, (2011) argues lack of readiness potentially leads to unsuccessful change implementation.

Gagnon (2014) in a significant Delphi study into chronic care pinpointed six key dimensions necessary for effective readiness for change: organisational contextual factors; leadership/participation; organisational support, motivation, organisational climate for change, and change content. Communication is a theme running through all of these dimensions in particular in the establishment of an accepting organisational climate.

Again, reflecting on scholarship within healthcare the concept the knowledge translation and its relationship to ORC become apparent. Knowledge translation in its narrow sense relates to the underutilisation of evidence-based research in systems of care. Scholars (Dobbins *et al.*, 2002; Laundry *et al.*, 2003; Nutley *et al.*, 2003) suggest that knowledge transfer is both a process and a

strategy based on the utilisation of research findings and improved outcomes for healthcare consumers, students and patients. In many respects it has at its heart of the idea of how knowledge is created and then applied for wider benefit. Consequently the link with ORC is clear, with readiness becoming necessary before new practices can be incorporated into healthcare structures.

It is suggested that the concept of knowledge translation can have wider application beyond the health sector and what constitutes benefit explored more fully in a societal context given that organisations are part of society and organizational survival critical from a socio-economic perspective. Although there are many theories of knowledge at its most basic knowledge is about having an understanding of something. This leads to the question of how knowledge is communicated and understood, in other words, translated and made to make sense. This has relevance to organisational change in any setting as organisations have to get their employees to understand change, make sense of it and contribute to its implementation.

Sensemaking, stories and the role of visual communications

There is no single agreed definition of sensemaking (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Broadly it is taken to mean the processes by which people seek plausibility to understand ambiguous, equivocal or confusing events (Colville *et al.*, 2012; Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995). This has relevance in any study addressing organisational culture and how people construct the realities of their day-to day lives (Holt and Cornelissen, 2014). Brown *et al.*, (2015) reflects that the subject can be viewed from a cognitive perspective (mental maps); collective-social (interactions between people) or discursive (linguistic/communicative). Although the distinctions are interesting from a scholarship perspective, practically it could be suggested they often overlap when implementing change communication programmes.

As Weick *et al.*, (2005: 409) suggests sense making is “an issue of language, talk, and communication. Situations, organisations, and environments are talked into existence”. van Vuuren and Elving (2008) therefore argue the importance of interpersonal communication and the meaning that is derived from interactions are of critical importance to sense making in the change process. This directly links to motivation and the energizing effects of interpersonal communication (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003; Dutton and Ragins, 2006).

As Taylor and van Every (2000: 40) stress “sensemaking involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly through words.” Yet visual communications is also a form of narrative and discourse. Often illustrations, pictures and drawings can be used to give voice to employee emotions (Barner, 2008). This may be accurate portrayal of situations or visual metaphors are sometimes used. In this context a metaphor is defined as understanding one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). He goes on to suggest these visual metaphors can help channel emotions and help employees articulate their reactions to change. It is suggested that such visual cues can also be used to help co-create and engage employees in the implementation of the change process itself.

Visual perspectives within organisational and management studies is a growing area (Davison *et al.*, 2012; Meyer *et al.*, 2013; Mitchell, 2011; Vince and Warren, 2012) suggesting that visual materials such as images, photos, drawings and artefacts have been used to add richness to organisational life and culture. The visual is a powerful teller of stories that are a critical component of sensemaking.

Stories help create meaning and understanding as suggested by Gabriel (2000), Gabriel and Connell (2010) and Cunliffe (2002b). What is interesting with visual communication is that it moves stories away from the traditional approach in organisations that tend to be through text allowing text behind images to be explored – hidden texts – that allow a deeper and fuller understanding

Integral to stories are the concepts of framing and semiotics. Bateson (1972) argues framing necessary to help individuals understand the communication and context helping to organise meaning and understanding. Therefore “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993:52). So framing is necessary to draw out particular aspects of story or message. To help do this, the study of signs (semiotics) is useful. Here signs simply mean anything from which meanings may be generated (such as words, images, sounds, gestures and objects). The relevance of image in this study is of particular importance.

Workarts

Blurring the boundaries between interpersonal and visual communication is the useful concept of *workarts*. Explored by Barry and Meisiek (2010) it emphasises the work that art does in workplaces as opposed to artwork. In many respects such an approach is in the tradition of Augusto Boal’s (1979/2008) dialogue technique (Image Theatre) based on symbolic still images. *Workarts*, however, incorporates the ideas of self-crafted and co-created images, as well as existing artefacts.

Critically, Barry and Meisiek (2010) build on the idea of collective mindfulness that as Weick *et al.* (2000) argue is the ability of groups and individuals to take notice of the every day detail of organisation life and have the freedom to act on it. This is seen as key to organisational survival (Levinthal and Rerup, 2006; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006). One way to foster mindfulness according to Barry and Meisiek (2010) is through analogous artefacts, especially those with artistic attributes that can be used to invite enquiry because of their unfamiliar relevance to the subject being explored. What is interesting is artefacts don’t have to pre-exist they can be self-crafted.

The creation of artefacts is a central feature of the arts (Heidegger, 1975; Shklovsky, 2004) and for Barry and Meisiek (2010) *workarts* is the arena in which art, artefacts and work come together. It contributes to the idea of seeing more and seeing differently which promotes context shifting and establishing distinctiveness. They argue that *workarts* play takes three different forms in organisations: art collections that can contribute to organisational culture and identity; artist-led intervention to help catalyse new perspectives and finally artistic experimentation allowing

organisations and their employees to create and make. They also suggest that there has been a growth in the use of various forms of *workarts* in recent years. It is suggested in part this is due to the rise of the experience economy and knowledge work that welcomes imagination and playfulness as articulated by Langer (2006) and as away of rebalancing the rigidity of scientific approaches to organisational theory.

There are words of caution to arts-based initiatives. In part individuals learn and process information in different ways (Kolb, 1985) so no one approach will work for everybody. At the same time, Clark and Mangham (2004) talk of organisational theatre whereby corporate theatre events are forms of corporate compliance and brain washing. At the heart of this debate is organisational power. One aspect of this debate is the way organisational power is seen as legitimate– though scholars disagree on key components of legitimacy (Beetham, 1991; Morrison, 2005) it does involve a commitment to shared beliefs, established rules and some of expressed consent. Critically it is the notion of legitimate authority that impacts on trust and allows for effective collaborative work practice that is underpinned by transparency (Kelly, 2006). At the same time, knowledge is seen as a power resource within organisations (Hales, 1993) often sharing knowledge is seen as loss of power that can often be in conflict with the importance of transparency. In times of change, transparent and adaptive leadership together with active engagement of employees is seen to be critical as earlier suggested by (Ruck, 2012). This approach encourages a greater equality in the power relationship within the organisation supporting the notions of legitimacy. Nonetheless, the idea of power and misuse of power is one that cannot be ignored in the change communication process.

Key themes from the literature suggest that is an opportunity to synthesise aspects of scholarship from various fields more fully into the idea of *workarts*. There is a depth and breadth in the work done around change management and change communications and a growing body of knowledge reflecting on visual communications, however the concept of *workarts* has had more limited empirical attention. At the same time, there seems to be a range of healthcare scholarship that appears to stand rather alone. As such this study aims to incorporate ideas from the literature and add greater granularity to practical change management activities.

Methodology

Research Philosophy

This research takes an interpretivist epistemological stance in part to reflect the complexity of organisations and the work place as suggested by Garavan and McGuire (2001) and where definitive laws and generalisations may be difficult and where a true understanding requires greater insights into human interaction. This was underpinned by the use of a case study that Robson (2002) regards as conducting research into a particular phenomenon in a real life setting using a variety of sources of data.

The study consists of ten in-depth semi-structured interviews and falls firmly into an exploratory approach finding out “what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess

phenomena in a new light” (Robson, 2002:59). It also included a review of the material developed by Orbit during 2010-2013 that focused on the first part of their change programme. It is intended to be the start of a longitudinal study following Orbit as it moves towards delivering its 2020 strategy. A case study approach was felt appropriate as a way of gaining a deeper understanding of the change process and the activities undertaken as suggested by Morris and Wood (1991).

A single case was viewed as most appropriate at this exploratory stage. As Yin (2003) argues this may be appropriate if it provides an opportunity for the researcher to observe and analyse a phenomenon that perhaps is under explored. Although it is recognised that this has limitations in terms of generalisability.

Interpretivism suggests the need to understand differences between humans in their role as social actors and that the study of people and institutions do not lend themselves to the approach of the natural scientist.

Here an inductive approach dominates whereby patterns are established from data in order to devise theory and conceptual frameworks. Research may evolve, emerge and develop as it progresses in order to seek meaning and understanding. Induction allows the data to guide the research with observation leading to explanation and theories. Here the researcher is part of the research instrument itself and enables a depth of understanding, penetrating rational or superficial responses and engenders a richer source of ideas through the use of language as opposed to statistics. The literature plays more of an inductive role with the view that helps to provide context and themes in which the study sits.

Research Methods

(1) The process behind the Orbit narrative, its creation and implementation

Practical insights were gained from analysing the material produced by Orbit to support the development and implementation of the Orbit narrative between 2010 and 2012. This was supported by three interviews with the Director of Human Resources at Orbit; the Human Resource Manager and the Change Consultant from Couravel Consulting employed to instigate and facilitate the process.

(2) Employee reaction to the process

Seven semi-structured interviews took place to gauge how the Orbit narrative was understood and ideas behind its creation and implementation. Semi-structured interviews allow topics to be covered through questioning whilst at the same time allow some variation to take into account the flow of conversation and themes or ideas that emerge. This allows for a wider perspective to develop on the social world under study and more insight to be gathered about how the social actors in this world operate and their involvement and response to the change communication processes.

All interviews were analysed using a thematic approach drawing on the work of Attride-Stirling (2001).

Validity, Reliability and Limitations

This is a small-scale study using qualitative techniques that are subjective. The limitations relate to its scope – a UK focus. Further studies in different cultural and organisational settings also needs to be encouraged and perhaps longitudinal studies developed to look at the longer-term impact of whether a incorporating visual and workart approaches can lead to improved change communications.

Findings and Discussion

Co-creational visual representation and narrative stimulates conversations about the change process

All respondents mentioned the co-creational elements of establishing the Orbit picture and narrative using existing pictures, drawing or scribbling.

At the start of the process, Orbit held facilitated sessions with an initial 100 people including the senior team to think about what it had to do to survive. To start this process it used its 5-year plan (2008-2013) and reflected on the history of the organisation. Out of this people were encouraged to use existing images that had been provided; create new images by drawing; or using key words and text to start to create a vision of where Orbit was (good) and where it needed to be (great) and beyond (greater). An initial picture was created known as the vanilla version. From this further discussions took place at team meetings and other facilitated sessions with a wide mix of Orbit people in order to create the final Orbit picture and narrative. At this point a graphic designer/artist was used to create the final colour visual. A summary of the initial process follows.

Developing the Orbit Story – The Process

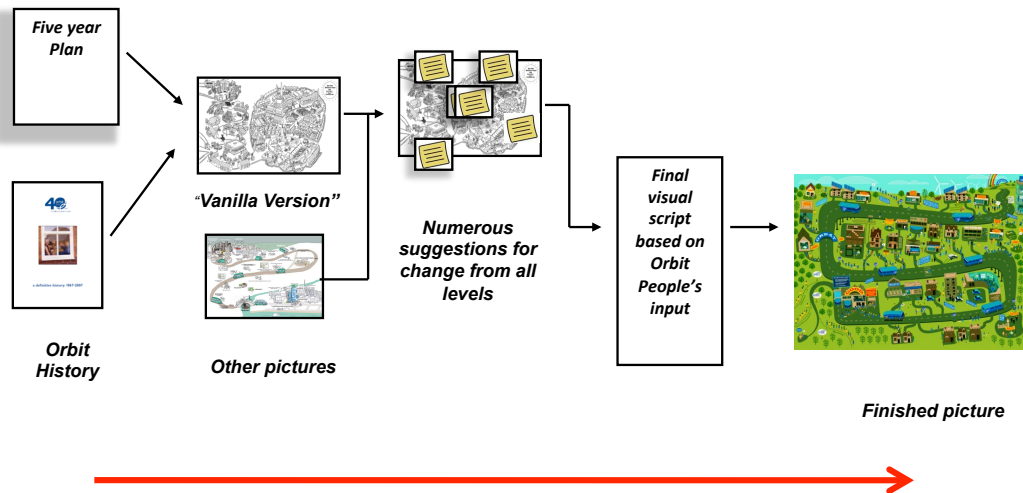


Figure 1: Developing the Orbit Story

Alongside the finished picture, detailed guidelines were produced to show how the picture was developed and how it could be used. This was intended for use by managers and by the senior team during a series of road shows to further engage Orbit people. These guidelines included detailed stages – how to lead conversations; proactively use feedback and how to embed it into normal work practices such as team meetings. The picture itself had four quadrants: Bottom left (where we are today); Bottom right (the role of the group and why we need to change); Top left (delivering the plan and key actions) and Top right (delivering into the future – beyond great). In the picture 37 key talking points were established.

The final version was then played back to staff through events, team sessions and road shows. During interviews everybody mentioned the concept of the world café's held during road shows where the Orbit narrative and picture was discussed. These consisted of pop-up café's where employees were encouraged to discuss the vision prompted by the picture.

“The world café's were the best when we could discuss the Orbit picture [we could] write or draw ideas on table cloths and come up with suggestions” (Interviewee 7)

Importance of visual metaphor to help understand change

A key concept repeated by all those interviewed was the concept of the bus and a road map reflecting that Orbit is on a journey. The idea of a journey seemed to resonate with everybody.

“It is not just about why we are on the bus but whether in the right seat” (Interview 3)

Interviewees got the metaphor and recognised that this was on-going change not just a one off process. All interviewees suggested that it got people talking either in team meetings or around the office generally. Part of the narrative prompts for managers was to get employees thinking about their current role and how their skills fitted into Orbit and its vision including whether they ought to consider moving into a new role where there would be a better fit, or perhaps reflecting on whether the journey was somewhere they didn't want to go.

Relevance of self-recognition in the change process and the importance of understanding where you have come from – celebrate what has been achieved

“Got the message across where people fit and every person has a place in it and now about a new culture.... Everyone is important” (Interviewee 4)

People liked the idea that they could see themselves and their role in the picture and the supporting narrative and conversations. Managers found it a useful way to open up discussions with staff, and staff found it useful to understand their roles and how they fit into Orbit where it has come from and where it is going.

“Used it for my team to see how we can help tenants and how we can contribute to delivering what Orbit stands for we don't just give tenants a leaflet but engage with them whether elderly or homeless” (Interviewee 6)

“Reason it was so useful it showed the link to communities and other parts of Orbit” (Interviewee 7)

This came out across the majority of interviews that the narrative once created was useful for induction and getting new employees to understand the journey as well. Also a way of triggering conversations about personal contributions people could make. Interviewee 7 gave the example from a team meeting when one of Orbit gardeners pointed out that the repair and maintenance team by just chatting to elderly residents could make all the difference to that individual. This played back to ideas around Orbit building communities.

Everybody felt they and their staff could contribute ideas to the early narrative (vanilla version) and subsequently if they had a good idea that would move Orbit on its journey to being better. Also importantly it recognised the achievements of Orbit up to the point of needing to change.

“No matter who you were everybody's thoughts used and got everybody on the same wave length” (Interviewee 6)

Conversational communication seen to be important not just information

“As a team we engage a lot more than before with everybody whereas before we were just a little team. Orbit felt like lots of little teams all separate now we are one.” (Interviewee 6)

Reflecting on how *workarts* has been used in Orbit, building on the ideas of Barry and Meisiek (2010) multiple artefacts were used such as existing pictures, self-generated drawings, illustrations, traditional text and even table cloths to disrupt thinking and generate ideas. These all contributed to the creation of the Orbit picture (and narrative) that then became an artefact in its own right that invited enquiry and debate. The artefact as a mechanism for dialogue and conversation clearly contributed to a sense of collective mindfulness a term used by Weick *et al.*, (2000) and seen as relevant for organisational survival (Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006).

The concept of artefacts also plays to the various themes around organisational culture. As Bates (1994) suggested organisations are constructed worlds shaped by people linking to Schein's (1999) ideas around culture emerging as groups develop shared experiences. The involvement in the creation of the Orbit picture and narrative then subsequent exposure through its use at team meetings, road shows and simply hung on walls around the office ensured Orbit employees had numerous formal and informal shared experiences discussing and interpreting the Orbit picture and by default discussing Orbit's organisational future and their involvement in delivering this. As scholars suggest (Gundry and Rousseau, 1994) culture is a complex social process grounded in the way human beings interact. At the same time, academics in this field talk of artefacts as one of contributors to culture. Brown (1995) explicitly talks of artefacts, along with language, values and beliefs as important, although it can be argued that these all interconnect linking to Schein (1992) three level's of culture – artefacts (visible organisational structure and processes – the Orbit picture as a visible artefact captured the organisational structure and the type of processes necessary); espoused values (here the Orbit picture helped stimulate debate and discussion about the new Orbit strategy and philosophy shaping it); basic underlying assumptions (the unconscious, taken for granted beliefs – although more difficult to judge the Orbit picture did get people to question Orbit's existence and the basis on which it was established and how it should move forward).

If one looks at the Barry and Meisiek (2010) classification, Orbit blended artistic experimentation generating artefacts from both top-down (leadership and management teams who were part of the initial 100 in establishing the vanilla version) and bottom-up (wider Orbit employees involved in wider facilitated sessions and road shows) and also incorporated aspects of artistic-led intervention with the use of professional graphic designers and illustrators for the final colour version suggesting that perhaps the boundaries between these two classifications can be blurred. Supporting the idea of artefacts the role of metaphor as a means of understanding is self-evident. The concept of the bus and Orbit being on a journey was repeatedly referenced linking to the role in particular that visual metaphors can play as elucidated by Barner (2007). The picture articulated a clear story suggesting the importance of storytelling as part of change and organisational life generally (Cunliffe, 2002b; Gabriel, 2000; Gabriel and Connell, 2010). As part of the story, it allowed people to say goodbye to the old but there was importance placed on the concept of good – to thank people for what they had done to date but now was the time to move on. This supports the ideas of Kübler Ross (1969) allowing people to mourn the old Orbit and allowing them a way to move on

The change at Orbit certainly relates to both a change in the routine ways of working, as well in some of the services offered so certainly identifies as a “disequilibrating process” as suggested by Trice and Beyer (1993:395). Where perhaps there is an interesting variation on some of the change definitions is around evolutionary and revolutionary. On one level the change is evolutionary rather than revolutionary using the terminology of Greenwood and Hinings (1996) as the change is clearly a long-term process but the entire organisation is affected making it fit more into a revolutionary category. Also although it shows signs primarily of additive change in terms of updating the organisation given the changes to its operating environment there are also elements of substitutive although perhaps not as radical as suggested by Corley and Gioia (2004) but the organisation has had to redefine itself moving away from the idea of social housing being a substitute for local authority provision to those unable to afford to purchase a home to becoming an organisation that has customers who come to them as a matter of choice.

The relationship between communication and culture is clear acknowledging the work of Bormann (1983) who places communication as critical in shaping organisational culture. The role of conversations was integral to the communication process allowing for two-way communication engendering the view of Elving (2005) that this is different to simple one-way information. The fact that Orbit is continuing to move towards its 2020 vision plays into the belief that communication strategies for change must focus on inclusion and co-creation as argued by Smythe (2007) and Clampitt *et al.*, (2000) to establish high levels of effectiveness and sustainability. This type of approach is best supported by adaptive styles of leadership as argued by Pascale *et al.*, (2000), but this doesn’t mean the absence of ultimately establishing a clear strategy and clarity that underpins the change process (Quirke, 2008). Orbit did establish a clear strategy and articulated this in the final Orbit picture establishing clarity is a key success criteria for change as suggested by Quirke (2008) but it did integrate viral approaches in terms of the strategy development and implementation which incorporates some of the thinking of Herrero (2009) in respect of ideas around embedding change through networks and relationships.

The concept of readiness and creating an environment and climate that will allow change to take place runs through the Orbit approach. Adopting the concept of readiness as part of change literature is a useful one as it supports the fundamental role that communication plays. The work of Gagnon (2011, 2014) exploring and identifying dimensions for readiness is one that should be further explored by public relations scholars as areas such as participation and leadership, motivation and organisational are at the heart of the Orbit’s communication strategy.

At the same time, the translational notion is useful. Translation focuses on the “fine-tuning of meaning” (Fuchs, 2009:21) and at its heart public relations is about creating meaning and understanding. If this is linked to the concept of knowledge and how new knowledge (such as that created through research, evaluation and evidence) is shared and adopted by organisations and society then public relations is in the business of knowledge translation. As part of the translation process the role of visual in helping to fine-tune meaning is important. At the same time, the vexed question of

power needs to be better understood in an organisational context and how this relates to participation and access to knowledge especially in the change process.

Conclusion

This study shows that *workarts* can provide practical value to those involved in managing change. It has the potential to contribute to how people make sense of change, own change and help ensure change is successfully translated and implemented. There is a strong link between sensemaking and storytelling with stories being used to help make sense of reality and socially constructed entities of which an organisation is one.

Turning to the original research questions, visual communications has a role to play in the change process. It provides an additional sensory component that contributes to helping people make sense of their work lives and understand and contribute to the change process. In respect of *workarts*, it is not suggested that this is the answer to effective change but blending artistic intervention and experimentation can add value and help stimulate dialogue and conversation that might not otherwise take place. The case of Orbit provides a straight-forward model of how to integrate the concept into the change communication process. Finally, the idea of knowledge translation is a useful one for public relations theory and practice and is under-explored in the scholarship. A translational turn is one ripe for further study.

(total characters: 38, 828 inc. table exc. References)

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